

VIEW OF STOKE GREGORY CHURCH.

STOKE GREGORY CHURCH,
SOMERSETSHIRE.

ANNEXED I send you rough sketches of Stoke Gregory Church, in Somersetshire.* I quite agree with you in condemning, as a general practice, the substitution of servile copies for original designs; still I cannot think that the occasional reproduction of a beautiful specimen, undertaken by an architect capable of appreciating its merit, as well as its fitness for the locality he may select, would be injurious to his own professional character, or to the interests of his employers, or the advancement of art. And it is easy to imagine cases where such reproduction would be more practicable or desirable, than an elaborate restoration of the building itself.

But however sparingly we would admit of close and accurate copies, I believe no one will deny the right of an architect to appropriate any feature that pleases him in the works of his predecessors. At least, his claim is only invalidated by his own want of judgment in selection, or his incapacity to carry out the idea.

The church of which I send you a notice, though it presents nothing very complicated in its construction, might furnish a useful hint to builders of modern churches. It has a central octagonal tower, springing, you will observe, as it were from the roof of the building itself, and not from a square base or stage,

appearing above the parapet, like those of Stafford, Tong in Shropshire, and, if I rightly remember, Nantwich. There may have been examples at Lynn and Coventry, where the towers are all that is left of the original work. But in Somersetshire we notice South Petherton, North Curry, Barrington, and Douling (which last has a spire), similar in this respect to the example under notice. The feature must be familiar to the traveller through Rhenish Germany, and some parts of the south of France.

The continental architects knew the value of the octagonal tower. This consists, I conceive, in the circumstance of its proportions appearing unvaried, or nearly so, in whatever point it is viewed. With a square tower, the character of the outline is often materially altered, according as it is viewed cardinally or diagonally. And when the tower is crowned with an octagonal spire, the change of proportion between the two, as seen in front, or at an angle, is very manifest. I was much struck with this in Chichester Cathedral, where the effect is somewhat increased by the oblong plan of the towers. It is probably from this feeling on the part of the architect that some of the most beautiful steeples on the continent spring from towers of which the upper stages are octagonal, which ensured the keeping of the proportions intended from whatever point the building might be viewed. Freyburg is an exquisite example of this arrangement.

I will now point out the peculiarity of con-

struction which might be adopted with advantage in the present day. The central octagon in the specimen before us is narrower than the chancel, or the nave between its piers. It might almost spring from the floor without touching any of the walls. Now its eastern and western arches pretty well span the church, without any great projection of the piers into its area. The transepts are not so wide; these nearly represent the width of the tower. But that their arches may correspond with its northern and southern sides, their faces must of necessity somewhat overhang the springs of the other arches; that they may not, however, lose their natural abutment, namely, that given by the walls of the body of the church, they consist of a series of receding orders, of which the outer or upper one is properly placed for the support of the tower, and the lower or innermost one, for the abutment of the walls. A somewhat similar arrangement occurs in the cathedral of Avignon, which has a small Romanesque central octagon, but no transepts. At Hempstead, near Gloucester, the tower, which is central, and narrower than the nave and chancel, has much the same kind of arch under its northern and southern sides.

The western arch (at Stoke Gregory) has three chamfered orders to the westward, and two to the eastward. The eastern arch, two to the westward, three to the eastward. The transept arches, four towards the area of the tower, two towards the transepts. The imposts of the eastern and western arches are continuous, without capitals,

* Our engraving is made from these.—Ed.